

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 07979 271640Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /082 W
-----016974 271712Z /47

R 271503Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6198
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USUN 755

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 7979

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT SY
SUBJ: SALAH BITAR RETURNS TO DAMASCUS

1. FORMER BAATH PARTY LUMINARY AND SEVERAL TIMES PRIME MINISTER
OF SYRIA SALAH BITAR RETURNED DAMASCUS JUST BEFORE
CHRISTMAS FOLLOWING AN ELEVEN YEAR ABSENCE. HAMOUD SHOUI, A
ONE-TIME TOP-RANKING PARTY COLLEAGUE OF BITAR'S AND NOW FOREIGN
MINISTER
DIRECTOR OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS, TOLD ME DECEMBER 27 THAT HE HAD CALLED
ON BITAR THE PREVIOUS DAY EXPECTING TO HEAR THAT THE LATTER
HAD REACHED SOME PRIOR UNDERSTANDING WITH ASSAD ABOUT
BITAR'S POLITICAL FUTURE IN SYRIA. BITAR FLATLY DENIED
ANY SUCH UNDERSTANDING AND CLAIMED HE HAD DECIDED ON THIS
VISIT MERELY TO EXPLORE WHETHER THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE IN SYRIA
FAVORED FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION PARTY.
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2. SHOUI DESCRIBED BITAR, NOW 69 YEARS OLD, AS PHYSICALLY
FIT AND MENTALLY ALERT. NOTED THAT BITAR HAD BEEN PARDONED
BY THE REGIME IN JANUARY 1976 FOR ALL ALLEGED POLITICAL
CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST THE STATE BUT HE HAD SPURNED SUBSEQUENT
QUIET INVITATIONS TO COME HOME. THIS WAS THE FIRST VISIT BITAR
HAD MADE TO HIS HOME TOWN OF DAMASCUS SINCE "ESCAPING"

FROM PRISON IN 1966. HE HAS SPENT MOST OF THE INTERIM RESIDING QUIETLY IN BEIRUT WITH FREQUENT TRIPS TO EUROPE. HE HAD DENOUNCED "ALL BAATH PARTIES" IN 1968, SEVERING AT THAT TIME HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH PARTY FOUNDER AFLAQ.

3. SOUFI PREDICTED THAT BITAR EITHER WOULD SOON REALIZE ON HIS OWN THAT THE MOMENT HAD NOT YET ARRIVED FOR A TRUE OPPOSITION PARTY, OR THAT HE WOULD BE ENCOURAGED BY THE REGIME TO RETURN TO BEIRUT ONCE ASSAD REALIZED BITAR'S INTENTIONS. SHOUIFI THOUGHT IT UNLIKELY THAT ASSAD WOULD IMPRISON A MAN WHOSE OPPOSITION TO PAST BAATHI POLICIES HAD LONG SINCE BECOME RESPECTABLE IN SYRIA. THIS VIEW WAS CONFIRMED BY LOCAL AP STRINGER WHO TOLD US ASSAD WAS PLEASED BITAR HAD RETURNED TO DAMASCUS, PARTICULARLY AS HE COMES FROM BAGHDAD. HIS RETURN WAS SOMEHOW VIEWED AS CONTRIBUTING TO ASSAD'S "LEGITIMACY."

4. SHOUIFI ADDED THAT BITAR HAD PUBLISHED ONE OF THE MOST INDEPENDENT MINDED AND SOBER ANALYSES OF SADAT'S RECENT POLITICAL INITIATIVES IN KUWAIT'S "AL-WATAN" LAST WEEK. ACCORDING TO SHOUIFI, THIS ARTICLE CRITICIZED SADAT FOR WEAKENING AN ALREADY WEAKENED ARAB SIDE BUT CONCLUDED BY ENCOURAGING OTHER ARAB LEADERS TO RALLY TO SADAT, LEST BY ATTACKING HIM THEY FAIL TO EXPLOIT THE OPPORTUNITY TO PUT ISRAEL ON THE SPOT AND SUCCEED ONLY IN FURTHER CONFIDENTIAL

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WEAKENING ARAB UNITY. SOUFI SAW NO LIKELY RELATION BETWEEN THIS ARTICLE AND BITAR'S REAPPEARANCE IN DAMASCUS.

5. ACTION: WOULD APPRECIATE MORE DETAILED SUMMARY OF BITAR ARTICLE.
MURPHY

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL LEADERS, VISITS, OPPOSITION PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 27-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DAMASC07979
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Handling Restrictions: n/a
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ISecure: 1
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Litigation History:
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Review Release Date: n/a
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Status: NATIVE
Subject: SALAH BITAR RETURNS TO DAMASCUS
TAGS: PINT, OVIP, SY, (BITAR, SALAH)
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Type: TE
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